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CITIZENS FOR PEACE

Minutes

December 8, 2009

The meeting opened at 7:00 pm with a welcome by President, Colleen Mills. She introduced Inner Peace Director, Caroline Trout, who opened the meeting with thoughts on compassion for others, especially the Haitian people who are the focus of tonight's meeting. She shared "...today is our day to help someone in need – listen, pray, help in whatever way you can..."

Special Presentation:

Colleen introduced Kim Redigan as a peacemaker with courage, based on some of her past experiences. Kim was in Haiti this past June and she was here to share her experience with a slideshow, video and talk.

Kim shared the following, startling, facts about Haiti:

- Haiti is the poorest nation in the western hemisphere; the fourth poorest in the world
- Population is 8-9 million people - with 80 % living in abject poverty
- One out of nine babies dies before its fifth birthday
- Life expectancy is 51 years
- Unemployment hovers around 70 %
- Haiti is the single most water-poor nation in the world

Kim said she studied the history and politics of this country before going, but she wasn't prepared for the amount of poverty she witnessed. Also, three fourths of the country is rural and lacks any form of basic infrastructure. Even the capital city, Port-au-Prince, lacks the infrastructure needed for the influx of rural people moving in. She shared that while the poverty she witness was horrific, do not despair. She came back with a lot of hope.

The primary purpose of Kim's ten-day trip was to attend the first graduating class of Haiti's first rural University, the University of Fondwa. And what a celebration it was! Education is highly valued in Haiti and over 400 people traveled across mountainous terrain for the five-hour graduation ceremony. This is no ordinary university, however. All areas of study offer the rural students an opportunity to serve their communities. Students must present a detailed project proposal on how they will utilize the education they are about to receive. And, they must complete the project before receiving a degree. Degrees offered: Management, Agronomy and Veterinary medicine.

Kim stated there were other works going on in the Fondwa region. Since 1988, APF, a program spearheaded by a visionary priest, Fr. Joseph Philippe has been the primary force in creating a sustainable infrastructure in this mountainous region. Projects include: soil conservation, reforestation (most of the trees are gone because they were used for fuel), primary and secondary schools, a bakery, feeding program, and health clinic.

Another group, providing hope for many Haitians is the Fonkoze – the country's largest microfinance institute, with branches in all of Haiti's rural provinces. In addition to micro-loans to assist Haitians in starting a business, Fonkoze offers programs on literacy, health and investment to help women out of poverty - another example of hope for a brighter future. Many believe, including Kim, that women are the future of Haiti.

Kim opened up a discussion session, and many were interested in how they could help. She said they are in dire need of vitamins – with minerals, baby hats and blankets (as the babies are freezing in the cold, mountainous terrain). Donations can be made through the Fonkoze, www.fonkoze.org. She received a loud applause for her efforts!

Announcements:

- Congratulations to our Vice President, Vincenza Mueller, who has accepted a position at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. We wish her every success – but we will miss her!
- We will hold our Election of Officers at the January meeting.

Colleen thanked all in attendance for their efforts in the past year and encouraged the group to continue to participate in the New Year! The meeting closed at 9:00 pm.